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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8825
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1872
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5350
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8943
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6519
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4348
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2337
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000195

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: MLS DIRECTOR MEETING WITH ETHNIC POLITICIANS

Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) In a March 25 meeting in Rangoon with EAP/MLS Director Blake, three ethnic politicians said the Committee Representing People's Parliament (CRPP), an organization of MPs-elected in 1990, has enjoyed greater freedom to meet since September 2008. They said CRPP members are not opposed to participation in the 2010 elections, but would not take part unless the regime first releases political prisoners and amends the constitution to reduce the military's political influence. The CRPP members believe any UNSYG Ban visit should be conditional on genuine political progress. Arakan League for Democracy Chairman Aye Thar Aung expressed support for U.S. and EU economic sanctions, while also favoring humanitarian programs, even if there is some leakage to the regime. In response to questions about the USG policy review, Mr. Blake stressed that the goal is to achieve meaningful change. End Summary.

Greater Latitude to Work

¶2. (C) In a March 25 meeting with visiting EAP/MLS Director Stephen Blake and Charge, Chairman of the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD) Aye Thar Aung, Mon Nationalities Democratic Front (MNDF) Chairman Nai Tun Thein, and MNDF Vice Chairman Nai Ngwe Thein explained that the CRPP is an organization of 1990 MPs-elect drawn primarily from ethnic political parties.

Regime scrutiny and persecution had long hindered their ability to meet, but since September 2008, they have enjoyed greater freedom to conduct business. They noted with pleasure that the National League for Democracy (NLD, Aung San Suu Kyi's party) has recently renewed its involvement in the CRPP's activities, and former prisoners and NLD Central Executive Committee members Win Tin and Khin Maung Shwe have participated in recent CRPP meetings. (Note: previously the NLD had publicly kept its distance from the CRPP, reportedly due to security concerns). As a result, the three CRPP members told us they now regularly discuss policy matters with the NLD and have begun to talk about contingency plans in case the NLD is banned in the run-up to the 2010 elections.

The Elections

¶3. (C) Echoing the NLD's position, the CRPP officials explained that the CRPP is not opposed to participating in the 2010 elections, but would not take part unless the regime first releases political prisoners and amends the new constitution to reduce the military's political influence. Aye Thar Aung described the new constitution and election plans as merely "a scaffolding" for the military to retain power and legitimize its rule. He predicted: change may come slowly without the elections, but it will come even slower with them. All three of the CRPP members expect the elections will be rigged. They said it is critical that the UN and international community not legitimize the results if that is the case.

UNSYG Ban Visit

¶4. (C) Nai Ngwe Thein told us the CRPP hopes UNSYG Ban makes any Burma visit conditional on genuine progress, including the release of prisoners and the start of genuine dialogue. He said the CRPP is concerned that Ban be careful not to diminish his stature by visiting Burma without obtaining tangible results.

US Policy

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¶5. (C) In response to questions about the USG policy review, Mr. Blake stressed that the goal of the ongoing review is to achieve meaningful change in Burma. Mr. Blake noted the Secretary's comments that neither sanctions nor engagement has produced tangible results yet, and he informed the CRPP members that all options are being considered.

¶6. (C) Arakan League for Democracy Chairman Aye Thar Aung expressed support for U.S. and EU economic sanctions as a positive way to foster change. When asked about the impact of sanctions on ordinary Burmese citizens, he said he believes most Burmese were desperately poor before the sanctions due to regime abuses and mismanagement and therefore have not been unduly impacted by economic sanctions. He added however, that given significant needs throughout the country, he supports humanitarian programs like the Global Fund, even if some of the money might end up being siphoned off by the regime.

Comment

¶7. (C) Like the NLD, the CRPP remains focused on the injustices of the 1990 elections. Still, the members we met remain committed to democratic change and have been thinking long and hard about what is best for Burma. Like many others we have spoken with recently, they are clearly interested in the USG policy review and will undoubtedly continue to offer advice on how we should proceed. End Comment.

DINGER